



Chame Road, a harbinger of development

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Dec 31, 2012-With the recent completion of the Chame-Besisahar road in Manang, a three-four day journey from Besisahar to Chame now only takes six hours. The 65km road linking Chame in Manang with Besisahar in Lamjung has made the lives of residents much easier, now that the transport and supply of goods has become faster. The road, which took 11 years to complete, was built by the Nepal Army.

With the new road, the price of daily essentials has decreased by around 30 percent. For instance, an LPG cylinder, which previously went for Rs 3,100, now costs Rs 2,300. One kg of pulses sell for Rs 140, the same quantity cost Rs 160 earlier. A packet of iodine-laced salt costs Rs 35 while it was Rs 45 earlier.

“With the construction of the road, the transport of goods has become cheaper, thus decreasing prices in the market,” said Anita Lama, former chairperson of the Chame Yuwa Samuha.

One local trader said they were charged Rs 25 to Rs 90 per kilo for the transport of goods on mule backs. However, the cost of transport of one kilo of goods is now Rs 15 on a vehicle.

“It was hard to ferry materials such as colour, tins and glasses. Now, charges to transport goods have decreased by Rs 10 to Rs 75 per kg,” said Prakash Shrestha, vice-chairman of the Manang Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Ratna Kumari Gurung, principal of the Dharapani Primary School, said that hopefully the production of apples and potatoes, two of the district’s chief exports, will increase and that the produce will now have better access to markets.

Besides the cheaper availability of goods, the road also means that locals will not have to charter helicopters to ferry the sick. “Chartering a helicopter is not an easy task for most people, given the cost and bad weather conditions,” said Gurung. Now, the sick can be easily transported on ambulances and vehicles.

Locals said that road has become the basis of development. “Development has started in remote areas. Now, the road should be upgraded,” said Sangdo Lama, owner of the Sangsi Hotel at Chame. Engineer Indibar Gurung, chief of the road construction battalion, echoed Lama, saying that such roads were paving the way for development.

However, despite being the harbinger of development, locals fear that the road might affect tourism on the Annapurna circuit and bring in pollution. “We fear that snow may not exist on the mountains in the future due to environment pollution,” said Gurung.

Tourism entrepreneurs fear that the inflow of tourists may decrease with the construction of the road. “The tourism business may collapse unless we explore an alternative trekking route,” said Binod Gurung, chairman of Tourism Entrepreneurs’ Committee, Manang.

The Annapurna circuit is one of the busiest trekking routes in the country. The trek begins from Besisahar in Lamjung and ends at Pokhara after going through Manang, Thorang-la, Muktinath, Jomsom and Myagdi. The 21-day trek has already been reduced to around nine days after the construction of roads in various areas of the district.

The trek is expected to shorten further to around three days with the construction of the Chame-Besisahar road and another road currently under construction in upper Manang. This new road, which will stretch from Chame to Upper Manang, is under construction by the Rural Reconstruction Project with help from the Asian Development Bank.

Lalit Dangol of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project said that the inflow of tourists has decreased. There were 3,560 tourists who visited the district last year, down to 2,848 this year. However, he did not attribute the decrease in numbers to the road.

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There is fluctuation in the number of tourists every year, he said. "Rather, the inflow of domestic tourists has increased," said Dangol. Domestic tourists from Kathmandu, Chitwan, Pokhara and Butwal are increasingly visiting the district.

Engineer Gurung, however, said that the road has affected the Annapurna circuit. "An alternative to this route should be sought," he said.

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